



## Child and Family Services Review Overview

Beginning in 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families began a new process to review state child welfare programs called the Child and Family Services Review. This review assesses what is actually happening to children and families who are receiving child welfare services in each state.

The review takes many different aspects of child welfare into consideration. Case records are examined to analyze how the child welfare system responds to help both the child and the family. Children and families are interviewed, as are representatives of other child welfare agencies and the courts.

The review also examines each state's infrastructure or 'system' that supports the delivery of child welfare services. These systemic factors include such things as staff training, evaluation of a state's computer data systems to track cases, or the state's efforts to license and recruit foster parents.

The review evaluates a state's child welfare system against a set of national standards. The national standards set a very high performance level for states to achieve. If a state does not meet or exceed the national standards, the state works with its federal partners to develop a Program Improvement Plan, targeting areas the state will work to improve. The state will be reviewed again in two years to monitor improvement. In 2001 and 2002, 32 states were reviewed. The remaining states were received in 2003 and 2004. Although they are not all completed yet (the last one expected in March 2004), to date, no state has met all the national standards.

Washington's onsite review was held November 3-7, 2003. Washington was the 47<sup>th</sup> state to go through the review, with review teams visiting three Washington areas: King County, Clark County and Grant/Adams County. The review teams studied case files and interviewed family members, caseworkers and service providers at each location. In addition, the teams also interviewed court representatives, other agency representatives and additional parties who are involved in the child welfare system.

With the help from the states' federal partners, this review will raise the bar for children's welfare programs across the nation. By setting high standards and timeframes for improvement, federal and state partners can dramatically improve child welfare outcomes for our nation's children and their families.



## **Steps of the Child and Family Services Review**

- 1 Data for Washington's foster care and child protective services was given to the Children and Family Services Program in October 2002 for review and analysis by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).
- 2 Washington State Child Welfare Program, with help from a committee of external partners, completed a Statewide Assessment in September 2003. The Statewide Assessment systematically studied the Department's child welfare system. The results helped identify areas the state performs well and areas that can be improved. The Statewide Assessment measured performance in staff training, the availability of services for children and families, foster parent training and recruitment, and other issues that influence the state's ability to provide services. The Statewide Assessment also gauged the Department's working relationship with other organizations and agencies.
- 3 Beginning the week of November 3, 2003, the on-site portion of the review began. Three teams simultaneously conducted the reviews at King County, Clark County and Grant/Adams County. The review teams studied case files and conducted interviews with family members, caseworkers and service providers. Additionally, court representatives, Tribes, partners, private agencies and stakeholders involved in the child welfare system were interviewed to gather information regarding their perspective of the overall health of the Washington welfare system.
- 4 Based on the results of the Statewide Assessment and the on-site review, the ACF determined the state's conformity with established national standards for safety, permanency and child well-being. These standards are set very high.



Like every other state that has gone through the review process, Washington did not exceed all of the standards. A final report will be delivered to the Department in February detailing the strengths and areas needing improvement.

- 5 Children's Administration formed a Program Improvement Plan team which will begin meeting in February 2004 to develop a Program Improvement Plan. The team is comprised of 10 workgroups, broken out into areas of focus (e.g. safety, permanency, well-being, etc.).

There are over 180 participants in the workgroups, which includes Children's Administration staff, Tribal representatives, community partners, private and other public agencies and stakeholders. The Program Improvement Plan will be submitted in three months from the date the final report is received. The state will be reviewed again in two years to examine the state's performance and progress with its improvement plan. There are financial penalties for states that do not show improvement during this two year period.

Washington could be penalized up to \$1.5 million if we have not demonstrated significant improvement when the state is reassessed in two years.

### **The Six Data Indicators Measured by the Review**

In evaluating a state's ability to provide for the safety, permanency and well-being for children and families, the review examines:

The system a state has developed for delivery of services; and

Data that tracks the outcomes from actual child welfare cases, referred to as data indicators.

These data indicators are compiled by computerized child welfare data reporting systems. The review evaluates six data outcomes or indicators for each child welfare system. Since the data is tracked by computers, a state knows the results of its six data indicators before the on-site review takes place. The on-site review studies how a state can improve to produce better outcomes.

Here are the six data indicators the review evaluates, and a brief narrative on why each data indicator is important to study.

- 1 Recurrence of maltreatment: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment, how many had another incident within six months?

*Breaking a cycle of abuse of maltreatment can be difficult. In a situation involving maltreatment, services are offered to family members to reduce future abuse or neglect. If a child suffers another incident of maltreatment, the case is examined to determine why earlier interventions were not successful in stopping the maltreatment.*

- 2 Foster care re-entries: Of all children who entered foster care, how many re-entered within 12 months of their previous episode?

*Social workers work with families in their homes, in an attempt to prevent a child from having to enter into an out-of-home placement. When it is necessary for a child to be placed out of the home, the social worker, courts, family, and providers work to develop a service plan for the family. The plan for most children who enter care is to reunite them with their families whenever it is safe to do so.*

*A service plan might include parent education classes, family counseling or substance abuse services, depending on the needs of the child and the family. If a child re-enters foster care again, it may be an indication that whatever services were provided, the family did not make or maintain sufficient changes to keep their child safe.*

- 3 Incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care: How many children in foster care suffered maltreatment by a foster parent or facility?

*Children are placed in foster care for their protection. States must assure that children placed in their care are safe. To help reduce the incidence of abuse in foster care, Washington licenses its foster homes. Potential foster parents are also interviewed, references are checked, a criminal history background check is conducted and a safety inspection is made of the home. When foster children are placed with a family, a social worker visits the foster home to help monitor the children's health and safety.*

- 4 Stability of foster care placement: How many children had no more than two placements during a 12-month period?

*Children in foster care often do better physically and emotionally when they have stability in their living arrangement. Being away from a familiar home, teachers, neighbors and friends can be very stressful. If a child can stay in one foster home where they can maintain some of those contacts and have a chance to get to know the foster family, it will be easier for the child to cope with being away from their family.*

*Sometimes foster families cannot make a long-term commitment to a child. Sometimes things happen to foster families making them unable to keep a child with them, such as moving or sudden illness. A particular child may not be a good fit for a foster family and problems arise that make placement with another foster family necessary. This can lead to the foster child feeling yet another loss and another failure. All states try to make a good initial placement so a child does not have to change their placement while in foster care.*

- 5 Length of time to achieve reunification: How many children were reunified with their families in less than 12 months of being placed in foster care?

*The paramount goal for a child removed from their home is to provide the family with services so they can be safely reunited in a timely manner when*

*possible. A plan is developed and approved by the courts to facilitate reunification if reunification is a safe possibility.*

- 6 Length of time to achieve adoption: For children in which reunification is not an option, how many children exited foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 24 months of being placed in foster care?

*When a child cannot safely be reunited with their family, states look for another permanent living arrangement for the child, preferably in an adoptive home. For many older children and children with special needs, adoptive homes can be hard to find.*



## The Seven Systemic Factors Measured by the Review

Each state must have a well-developed child welfare program to produce consistently good outcomes for children and families. The system is the foundation of the child welfare program. One of the goals of the review is to identify areas in each state's system that can be improved. The review is not looking for quick fixes, but permanent solutions to build a strong foundation that provides comprehensive and quality services.

The seven systemic factors evaluated by the review are:

**Agency Responsiveness to the Community:** The ability to work with other public and private community partners to develop and coordinate case planning for children receiving services through the child welfare system.

**Statewide Information System:** A good computer system that can identify the status, demographic characteristics, location and goals for placement of every child in foster care.

**Foster and Adoptive Licensing, Recruitment and Retention:** The state establishes and maintains standards for foster and adoptive homes, and uses

criminal background checks and other means to ensure the safety of children in out-of-home placements.

**Case Review System:** Every case has a written case plan developed with the family. Regularly scheduled permanency hearings must be held for each child in foster care, and caregivers must be notified of hearings, and given an opportunity to participate.

**Quality Assurance System:** To develop and implement standards to ensure that children receiving care are provided quality services.

**Service Array and Resource Development:** To provide an extensive array of services to help families remain together, or to help children who are going to be adopted. The services meet the physical, mental health and educational needs of the children.

**Staff and Provider Training:** The state provides initial and continuing training for both child welfare staff and foster and adoptive parents.